

H 73 C5

1916

3539
73 C5
16
py 1

Christmas: 1916

O. R. HOWARD THOMSON

3
2 3 1 1
2 3 1
2 3 1
2 3 1



Christmas: 1916

(ETCHINGS)

BY

O. R. HOWARD THOMSON

Author of "Resurgam: Poems and Lyrics";
"The Modern Comedy"; etc.

Printed for private distribution
1916

Copyright 1916
By O. R. HOWARD THOMSON

PS 3539
H73 C5
1916

PRESS OF
THE GAZETTE AND BULLETIN
WILLIAMSPORT, PA.

5

NOTE: The incidents in "X" have been extracted from an article by Captain Maurice Woods in "The Contemporary Review." The last line, with the exception of one word, is a phrase used by Captain Woods himself.

DEC -7 1916 ©CL.A454006

220 1

I

"Christe eleison ———,"

*Mounts the cry of anguished souls,
From the depths of the bowered tropics
To the white plains of the poles.*

Unending and unceasing;

*Wrenched from the world's despair;
Like the smoke of a burning mountain
Rolls up the ancient prayer.*

II

Blood-stained and still, the pudgy priest
Is stretched, where once the grain
Rippled its sweet green finery
Expectant of the rain.

Ten yards beyond, a shell-torn boy
Curses the priest's delay;
While o'er the field, unmoved, untouched,
The mighty cannons play.

III

Up! and out! and across the strip
That separates foe from foe:
Up! and out! with a yell and a shout
The gaunt-faced fighters go:
Led by a stripling from the ships,
With a song in his heart and a jest on his lips,
Over the field to the battered trench—
Over the field where the dead men lie
With their filmed eyes gazing at the sky.

*"Oh damn the Germans and damn the French
And damn the English who never blench!*

*Ho! club your rifles
And use their butts,
And jab your bayonets
Into their guts!"*

Swirls of smoke and jets of fire,
Corpses ever piled up higher,
Chests that heave and limbs that strain,
Blinded eyes and stabs of pain,
Gleaming steel and leaden hail
And one flag flying in the gale.

*"Oh whoa! you fellows: the trench is won!
And a damned good sporting job you've done:*

*But the big guns' hits
Knocked the ditch to bits,
So stow the grin
And dig yourselves in.*

*Oh damn the Germans and damn the French
And damn the English who never blench!"*

IV

Six ships running across the sea,
As full of shrapnel as ships can be:
Six days dodging of submarines
And sweating over the might-have-beens:
Six days getting to men who give
Their lives that honor still may live:
And six men who in an office sit
Counting the cash they get for it.

Christmas: 1916

V

Blue sky and ten thousand stars,
Hedged fields and evening hymn,
And the evil planet, red-eyed Mars,
Below the horizon's rim.

Grey shapes that sail in the air,
Red bombs and cots ablaze:
Women and children, blown to bits,
To the sound of a people's praise.

VI

"Christe eleison ——,"

*Mounts the cry of anguished souls,
From the depths of the bowered tropics
To the white plains of the poles.*

*Unending and unceasing;
Wrenched from the world's despair;
Like the smoke of a burning mountain
Rolls up the ancient prayer.*

VII

“Mother! I write these lines, for it may be that I,
After to-night, shall never write again:
They say we charge to-morrow, at the dawn—
The dawns in France are very beautiful—
Well—if I die, it will not matter much:
You ever saw through mothers’ eyes and laid
Over my dull metal, broad sheets of gold
From out the stores of your great treasury of love.
So, do not cry. I do not grudge my life.
What better usage could I make of it
Than cast it, as a woman casteth jewels,
Upon my country’s altar? Time ever moves
A stream, majestic, towards its far-off goal;
’Tis only we, foam-flecks upon its breast
Dream it knows turmoil; or whinny like to mares
Robbed of their foals, because we are absorbed
Before we have grown tired of the light,
Into its darker depths. Dear! God still lives;
And noble faiths, refulgent as God’s self,
Live on with him. Visions of right and faith,
Now lonely flowers in a wilderness
Of weeds, making the world a garden: high hopes
Of brotherhood: emergence of broad streams
Of human joyousness: of simple rights,
Not guarded by long trains of cannonry,
But like fair Kings, enshrined within the hearts
Of all their peoples, by the peoples’ love:
Laughter of children —————”

VIII

Oh, of old they offered her rosemary
And silk veils for her head:
But now they offer her unbleached sheets
And wet clay for a bed.

They will lay her down with her face to the north,
The red cross on her arm,
And a priest will mumble a hurried mass
To guard her soul from harm:

And some of the men will pray and some,
Unfearing men and strong,
Will figure the price that must be paid
By those who did the wrong.

IX

“Oh, hops? Yes, he knew hops—damned little more!
For all his forty years, before this war
He never stretched his legs outside of Kent.
Hops need much watching! so like a mole he spent
His life in his own burrows, training hops
To grow up sticks. His prayers were for his crops,
If he made prayers at all. Ten months each year
He sweated, that the taverns might sell beer
Of which he bought one pot each night, himself,
To make him dream of—hops! The heaped-up wealth
Of India, had not dragged him from the fields
Before the fruit the giant green vine yields,
Was safe within the oasts. Italian skies;
Fair women wearing silken draperies;
Soaring cathedrals; statues, gleaming white
Midst cypress trees upon a moon-lit night;
The song of poets; music, bridging space—
He had not heard of: but, his face
Would brighten somewhat if one mentioned hops,
Or chestnuts, pollarded, to grow their props.
God, a dull oaf! And now, beneath a sun
That kisses grapes, not hops, his drab life done,
From all his stupid, hop-made cares released,
He spreads for kites and crows a dubious feast.
Yet, as I live, I heard him as he fought
For breath, and with his short-nailed, coarse hands
caught
At the brown stubble in his pain, mutter of faith
Kept to the death; and of a shining wraith
That men call English honor; of a light,
Born in Arthurian times, which by its might
Would break fair highways for a later breed
Of nobler men. Good God! queer words indeed,
For one whose life was dedicate to hops!”

Christmas: 1916

X

Within the crater, where dead men, in rows,
Lay like sardines, against each other pressed,
A calm-eyed Tommy smoked his short-stemmed clay,
And spread his breakfast on a dead man's chest.

Green skins and breakfast tea! My stomach retched,
And in a trench, abandoned on my right,
I sought a moment's respite from the filth,
The lust and fury of the hellish fight.

Would God, I had not gone! from out the trench's clay
A corpse, from its waist up, protruded evilly,
Naked, with blue veins raised upon white flesh—
The blasting climax of indecency!

XI

"Christe eleison ———,"

*Mounts the cry of anguished souls,
From the depths of the bowered tropics
To the white plains of the poles.*

*Unending and unceasing;
Wrenched from the world's despair;
Like the smoke of a burning mountain
Rolls up the ancient prayer.*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 018 395 434 9

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 018 395 434 9

